

Date: 25 August 2014

Opposition: Manchester City

Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	MEN
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25 August 2014

## THE TIMES

Liverpool undone as Jovetic provides striking contribution

Manchester City 3 Jovetic 41, 55, Aguero 69 Liverpool 1 Zabaleta (og) 83

Up in the directors' box, Mario Balotelli sat impassively. The former Manchester City forward had announced himself thrilled to be back in English football with Liverpool, but last night brought an uncomfortable reminder of why he left in the first place. Put simply, City had no need for him. Balotelli was City's fourth-choice centre forward by the time he left Manchester for AC Milan in January last year. If anything, their firepower has increased since then. On an evening when City sent out another impressive early statement of intent in their defence of the Barclays Premier League title, Stevan Jovetic scored twice last night, showcasing a talent that was seen only fleetingly last season, and Sergio Aguero within 23 seconds of his introduction as a second-half substitute. Only two points separated City, the champions, from Liverpool in the Premier League table last May, but last night reinforced the feeling that the gap will widen this season. City are a more settled side under Manuel Pellegrini now, fortified by the arrival of Fernando from Porto, while Liverpool look like what they are: a team whose progress under Brendan Rodgers will undoubtedly take a hit after the loss of Luis Suarez, one of the outstanding players in world football, to Barcelona. City made an uncertain start last night, but Jovetic's goal late in the first half, after a mistake by Alberto Moreno, was followed by a show of strength in the second period. Jovetic, with a well-taken second goal, and Aguero made it 3-0 before an unfortunate own goal from the excellent Pablo Zabaleta gave the scoreline a little respectability from a Liverpool viewpoint. Balotelli will give them many things -- not least a few headaches, one suspects -- but his output will have to improve considerably if he is to elevate his new team to within touching distance of City again. For all the media focus on Balotelli, the man at the centre of attention at kick-off was Steven Gerrard. The home supporters spent much of the first half mocking the Liverpool captain for the slip that has gone down in history as the moment that his team surrendered the Premier League title race to City last April. Gerrard had more pressing concerns, trying to establish control of a midfield in which he, Jordan Henderson and Joe Allen were up against the powerful duo of Yaya Toure and Fernando. For the majority of the first half, the extra man in central midfield seemed to have tipped the balance in Liverpool's favour, but they fell behind four minutes before the interval when Jovetic capitalised on poor defending by Moreno. Moreno, the new arrival from Seville, could hardly have asked for a more daunting debut in English football, but rudimentary errors of this type will not easily be excused. The left back seemed to be a split second behind the play from the moment that Samir Nasri floated a pass behind into the penalty area for David Silva to run on to. Dejan Lovren beat Silva to the challenge, but Moreno's reaction was far too casual, a lazy swing allowing Jovetic to intercept and drive a shot between Simon Mignolet's legs to give City the lead.

The self-destructive aspect notwithstanding, the half-time deficit felt harsh on Liverpool. To that point, they had shown an increased focus and discipline in defence, their 4-3-3 system morphing assuredly into 4-5-1 whenever City had the ball. Their only real scare had come on 13 minutes when, after a swift Jovetic-led move down the left-hand side, Gael Clichy crossed to the far post, where Zabaleta, lurking behind Moreno, struck a full-blooded volley over the crossbar. Liverpool played the more measured football in the first half, frequently looking to thread passes behind the City central defence for their wide players to run on to. Evidently Rodgers feels that this is City's Achilles' heel, having deployed a similar tactic when the teams met last season. Once again Liverpool looked to well-timed runs from Raheem Sterling, moving infield from the right flank. One such pass from Gerrard saw Sterling escape from Martin Demichelis, but, shooting on the turn, he missed the target. Sterling then moved to the left to pick out a similar run from Henderson, but the midfield player was crowded out. Sterling then found Daniel Sturridge, who checked inside Vincent Kompany's challenge but saw his shot blocked. That was as good as got for Liverpool, who within minutes had succumbed to Jovetic's first goal. Sturridge put the ball in the City net early in the second half, but he was offside from Glen Johnson's cross. By now the home defence looked unyielding. Kompany made two highly impressive challenges, while Zabaleta was outstanding at right back, having been quick to pick up where he left off last season. The high point of the evening came ten minutes into the second half. Jovetic showed fine technique and vision to flick Silva's pass into the path of Nasri and immediately ran into the penalty area in search of the return pass. Jovetic's run went unchecked by the Liverpool defence and, when picked him out, the forward swept his shot past Mignolet to make it 2-0.

Briefly, with Lazar Markovic on as substitute, Liverpool threatened through Sturridge, but the England forward was not on his game. One shot was blocked by Kompany, another fisted away by Joe Hart and, when he was picked out by Moreno's cross midway through the second half, Sturridge missed the target. Aguero showed Sturridge how it was done. Having scored in a brief appearance as a substitute away to Newcastle United eight days earlier, the City forward made an even more immediate impact, trotting on to the pitch, anticipating where Jesus Navas would send the ball, running beyond Lovren and sweeping a low shot past an unconvincing Mignolet. Liverpool looked at risk of capitulation, but they rallied. Sturridge won the ball from Demichelis and crossed to Rickie Lambert. The forward's header was saved by Hart, but the ball bounced in off Zabaleta, offering Liverpool some consolation before their difficult start continues against Tottenham Hotspur at White Hart Lane on Sunday.

## the guardian

Jovetic too hot for Reds to handle: Pellegrini hails Manchester City's 3-1 win over Liverpool as being worth six points

Manuel Pellegrini hailed his side's victory over Liverpool last night as worth six points as the champions made an early-season statement of intent to defend their crown against one of their title rivals.

Two goals from Stevan Jovetic plus one from the substitute Sergio Aguero were answered only by a Pablo Zabaleta own-goal as Manchester City coasted to victory by 3-1 against the visitors.

With City having won their opening two Premier League games, after Newcastle United were defeated in the season opener, a pleased Pellegrini said: "For me these are games of six points - especially when you play at home. Liverpool is an important team and one that will be fighting for the title. We have had a hard start to the season so it is important for us to win the second game."

Pellegrini was particularly happy with Jovetic, who endured an injury-plagued first campaign at City, as the Montenegrin scored on 41 and 55 minutes after the manager stated last week that the real player would be seen this term. "Yes and not only for his goals," said the Chilean. "He was working the whole game, without the ball too. He was very unlucky last season but we never had any doubt about this quality. To start the season in this way after an unlucky new season is good."

"I don't think it is like a new signing. We need four strikers. At this moment Stevan is doing very well but you cannot forget [Alvaro] Negredo is injured. We need four. [Edin] Dzeko and Jovetic and Aguero are working well. It is important that they continue playing the way they did."

Aguero entered as a 68th-minute replacement for the injured Dzeko and scored almost instantly, while Pellegrini said of the Bosnian centre-forward's problem: "It was a kick and he had some trouble with his leg. We will see tomorrow but I think it will be OK."

While Zabaleta's own-goal came in the 83rd minute, Aguero's finish followed the one he collected at Newcastle, again when coming on as a substitute. The Argentinian is being coaxed into fitness after carrying injuries at the World Cup. Although Zabaleta was able to start for City despite also being involved in Argentina's campaign at Brazil 2014, Pellegrini has no concerns regarding Aguero. "It is different," he said. "Maybe they have the same delays in preparing but it is not the same with Kun. He had a difficult second part to the year and an injury at the World Cup. It is important he has a good preparation. Kun Aguero is a very special player for us and it is important for us. It was good that the first ball he touched was a goal. That was not luck. He is working very hard during the week and this is an important reward."

Eliaquim Mangala, the pounds 32m summer signing, is also regaining fitness. "We will see during the next week [if he can face Stoke City on Saturday]. It is not just him," said the manager. "A lot of other players arrived late and we will see how we can do it so they can be 100% fit. We have to play seven games in 20 days after the international break. It is important we take advantage of every day. That is why it has been so difficult pre-season and at the start of the season."

Jovetic said: "There are so many beautiful moments now after so many problems last year. But I don't want to think about that as it's the past. I just want to enjoy with this team with these players and to win as many titles as we can. It's difficult [to remain in the team], I know that. But my job is just to go out on to the pitch and do my best."

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## The Mail

CITY EXPOSE THE GAP; Jovetic double as Liverpool's shaky defence fails test

MAN CITY 3 Jovetic 41, 55 Agüero 69 LIVERPOOL 1 Zabaleta (og) 83  
IT took seconds. No sooner had Edin Dzeko limped from the field than the mighty Sergio Agüero appeared on the touchline. No sooner had Agüero stepped onto the pitch than he had scored from a brilliant cross by another substitute, Jesus Navas. And there, in capsule form, is the power of Manchester City this season. They have a great team and then, if you don't like it, they have another one waiting in the wings. Awesome. Liverpool ran Manchester City close last season. It is hard to see that happening again, Mario Balotelli or not. Liverpool are the second biggest spending club in the world this summer, after Barcelona, and they were undone by City's fourth choice striker. Not Agüero -- he was merely the icing on the cake -- but Stevan Jovetic, the Montenegrin purchased from Fiorentina but as yet thwarted by injury and a queue during his time in Manchester. Not anymore. Paul Scholes, among others, has been predicting this as Jovetic's year and his two goals against such well-fancied opposition suggested he may have a point. Jovetic gave City the lead shortly before half time, but it was his second that caught the eye and imagination in equal measure. It was a 19-pass move, which is in itself impressive, but the final three exchanges were the flourish that brought the crowd to its feet. Jovetic fed the ball to Samir Nasri and made an intuitive run for the return pass, which arrived perfectly and was dispatched with an irresistible finality. Liverpool were done. An 83rd minute own goal came more by luck than judgement -- Joe Hart made a brilliant save and was desperately unlucky that the ball was bundled over the line -- and Sunday's match with Tottenham Hot-spur is now an early cup final. Brendan Rodgers cannot afford to lose to two significant rivals in the space of the week. They won't come up against too many teams like City, though, certainly not with this incredible strength in depth. To replace David Silva with Navas, and Dzeko with Agüero is not an option open to many. The fans were torn between applauding Dzeko's effort and delighting in Agüero's return. By the time Navas had taken out five Liverpool players with one pass and Agüero had fired the ball past Simon Mignolet with his first touch, their minds were made up. This was a good news day, no doubt about it. It is to Liverpool's credit that Manchester City's busiest player in the first half was goalkeeper Hart, even if he was not driven to make great saves. It was his other qualities, dealing with crosses, gathering, anticipating that thwarted Liverpool's forward possession. Even so, there were signs that this revamped Liverpool team was knitting under Brendan Rodgers with greater success than, say, Tottenham Hotspur under Andre Villas-Boas last season. The problem was that City have a defence which, at its best, is capable of keeping the most dangerous of forward lines at bay for long periods, while some in the Liverpool ranks are still familiarising themselves with Premier League football at the elite level. Left back Alberto Moreno, for instance, who was playing his first game following his PS15million transfer from Sevilla. After a promising, uncompromising start it showed. Moreno was at fault for the gap, surprised by the sheer pace and physicality of the competition -- a league in which even a moment's pause can be fatal. So it proved in the 41st minute when, after a dormant spell lasting close to half an hour, City burst into life and scored the first goal of the game. There is real strength in depth here this season -- Agüero is yet to start a match, remember -- and this was a move that showed the variety City now have in their attacking play. Nasri played the pass of the match to Silva from the right and Silva held it up superbly -- not his most renowned gift -- before laying it back to the onrushing Jovetic. He sped past Moreno who appeared startled by the initiative and, before Dejan Lovren had time to adequately cover, shot the ball with great venom through the legs of goalkeeper Mignolet. It was a goal like a lightning strike, explosive, powerful and quite stunning. Liverpool had plenty of possession and some nice approaches to goal, but nothing like this in the first half. City, although far from impressive, were always more direct, more decisive. Jovetic put Dzeko in with a clever little dummy in the eighth minute but he struck his shot just wide and Pablo Zabaleta should have done more with a deep cross from Gael Clichy five minutes later which he met on the volley but sent into orbit. When Martin Skrtel headed a cross out after 15 minutes, Yaya Toure obeyed the implorations of the crowd to shoot but Mignolet was equal to the effort. Liverpool had lots to recommend them early on but little that threatened in quite the same way. Raheem Sterling -- their best player, causing City trouble just as he did when these sides met at Anfield in April -- was picked out by a long ball from Moreno after ten minutes but could only aim a weak shot wide. The same player found Daniel Sturridge soon after the half-hour, the England striker getting good connection on his shot, but striking it directly at Hart -- an echo of his frustration in front of goal during the World Cup. Hart was impressive, even if the locals voiced displeasure at a decision to punch a cross they thought might just as easily have been caught. Perhaps the circumstances were more trying than they appeared to the naked eye. There was summer rain and a blustery wind and the building work currently taking place at the Etihad Stadium might create more corridors of breeze than previously existed. For the most part, Hart's handling was excellent, even if some of the service, particularly from Steven Gerrard early on, struggled to find its range. Finally beaten by Sturridge from a Glen Johnson cross after 49 minutes, Hart will have been grateful to see a linesman's flag correctly raised for offside.

## The Daily Telegraph

City make statement with Jovetic double

Manchester City 3 Jovetic 41, 55, Agüero 69 Liverpool 1 Zabaleta og 83 Att: 45,471  
Stevan Jovetic, who has taken time to settle in English football, reminded the Premier League of his class with two well-taken goals, and also reminded everyone of Manchester City's strength in depth. A player pursued in the past by Liverpool, notably in 2009 and 2010, punished them here. This felt ominous from City, and perhaps only Chelsea have the quality to live with them this year. The champions swept aside their closest challengers last season with that brace from Jovetic and a typically precise finish from Sergio Agüero. The only negative was Edin Dzeko's hamstring injury. This was a dispiriting evening for Liverpool, who lost Glen Johnson to a groin injury while their other fullback, Alberto Moreno, struggled at times on his debut. They pulled a late consolation back through Pablo Zabaleta's own goal but the only positive was the sight in the stands of Mario Balotelli, Liverpool's new signing and a controversial figure during his time at City. At half-time, the City DJ played the Buzzcocks' 'Have you ever fallen in love with someone (you shouldn't have)'. It was not a warning to Liverpool fans, merely a random selection, and the guests will not care; they could do with Balotelli's presence. Jovetic highlighted the importance of having strength in depth in attack. Liverpool had known all about Jovetic's ability, having tried to buy the Montenegrin during his days at Fiorentina. As a teenager, Jovetic had twice found the mark against Liverpool in 2009, first beating the offside trap to score past Pepe Reina and then shooting home via a deflection. Jovetic certainly looked the Premier League part in striking either side of half-time, and looking even more important to the champions' cause when Edin Dzeko limped off, although Agüero promptly showed his class with City's third. "That's why we're champions" chanted the home fans in this meeting between last season's top two. That title rivalry between the pair was seen and heard everywhere here. Outside the ground, the decorators had been busy over the summer, hanging huge photographs of great moments from City's history, including Vincent Kompany lifting the Premier League trophy last May. Inside the stadium, as the clock had ticked down towards kick-off, the large screens showed clips of City's title triumph, of Yaya Toure and Samir Nasri scoring. The short film was soon given a soundtrack with home fans singing "stand up for the champions" and making jibes about Steven Gerrard's expensive stumble against Chelsea at Anfield. "He's going to slip in a minute," chorused one of the blue corners. Gerrard was in deep midfield, allowing Jordan Henderson and Joe Allen to push on, the Welshman's starting role indicating that Lucas's days may be numbered and that the Brazilian may be heading to Rafael Benitez's Napoli. Philippe Coutinho and the right-sided Raheem Sterling flanked Daniel Sturridge as the new PS16million striker, Mario Balotelli, looked on from underneath a splendidly over-stated hat seemingly from the old Gertrude Shilling thermal range. Liverpool enjoyed some good moments in the first half, building on their numerical supremacy in mid-field, but it was book ended by strong periods of City play, the second bringing Jovetic's opener. Jovetic was always involved. Early on, Toure lifted a pass wide to Nasri, who picked out Jovetic. The momentum did not slow, the Montenegrin back-healing the ball down the line to Gael Clichy. The French full-back lifted his cross to the far-post where Pablo Zabaleta volleyed over. Zabaleta had ghosted in from the right, an area supposedly protected by Alberto Moreno, the PS12million signing from Sevilla. Gerrard, ignoring the jibes, then came to the fore, pushing up and seeing a shot deflected wide. Gerrard then curled in a free-kick punched out by Joe Hart. Yet City's threat on the counter was always evident. Toure curled a ball down the inside-right channel for Dzeko but Martin Skrtel, reading the danger well, slid in to divert the ball to Simon Mignolet. Back came Liverpool, Sturridge briefly demonstrating his qualities against his former side. Tricking Kompany with his quick feet, Sturridge created a chance but Hart saved well at the near-post. The focus then shifted back to Liverpool's area, and again some uncertainty by Moreno. As Zabaleta darted into the box, Moreno dived in, almost catching the Argentine and was fortunate that Gerrard had anticipated the problem and was back to cover. With four minutes remaining of the half, Moreno was reminded of the speed of the Premier League. When Dejan Lovren headed out, Jovetic reacted quicker than Moreno, nicking the ball past the Spaniard. As Lovren dived in vainfully, Jovetic did to Mignolet what he had done to Reina, the then Liverpool keeper, five years ago. Liverpool then almost scored, Gerrard chipping a free-kick to Henderson, whose attempted cross was blocked by Zabaleta. City stayed calm, and simply doubled their lead after 55 minutes with a sumptuous move, involving 19 passes. The key interchange came when Jovetic flicked the ball to Nasri and then drilled in the Frenchman's pull-back. Johnson had no chance on the line. It got worse for Liverpool. After Dzeko hobbled away with a hamstring problem, Agüero sprinted on, scoring after 23 seconds. Running on to a superb pass from another substitute, Jesus Navas, Agüero ruthlessly swept the ball past Mignolet. With 11 minutes remaining, Jovetic departed to a standing ovation. City suffered a few late nerves, mainly when Liverpool pulled a goal back. Sturridge did well to fashion the opportunity, crossing with the outside of the boot to Rickie Lambert, whose header was brilliantly saved by Hart. The ball bounced out, hit Zabaleta and flew back past Hart. The England keeper clawed the ball out but the goal-line technology clearly confirmed it had crossed the line. Liverpool could then have made it 3-2, causing more palpitations, when Lambert decided to pass to Sturridge when the situation cried out for a shot. Liverpool's

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evening then gained another cloud when Johnson went off, having damaged his groin.

## THE INDEPENDENT

Jovetic at the double in City's show of strength

It was only April that Phillipe Coutinho scored a late winner against Manchester City at Anfield and Liverpool started to believe for the first time that season they might be serious contenders for the title. What has changed since then? In a nutshell, Liverpool have sold their best player while City have signed many of theirs to long-term contracts. When a player of the quality of Sergio Agüero can be dispatched as a substitute, ostensibly the third-choice striker on the night, then beating the City of 2014 can be a daunting prospect. Yet there is no getting away from it, Luis Suarez was Liverpool's entree into this world of the very elite clubs capable of competing for Premier League and, perhaps Champions League titles, and without him they are less able of defeating teams like City.

A line can be drawn through the football hierarchy, towards the very top, and its great clubs can be divided into two groups: those who sell their best players and those who buy the best players. City no longer have to sell their best players; they are in the business of buying other teams' best. There is no shame in being one of the sellers, a group even Manchester United have belonged to since losing Cristiano Ronaldo to Real Madrid. Over the course of the season it may well be that Brendan Rodgers' reinvestment of the Suarez profit margin will prove to be astute. Perhaps Mario Balotelli, in the directors' box at the Etihad last night, will finally deliver on his undoubted promise. But you would be hard pressed to imagine him replicating Suarez's returns. That was the prevailing mood as one watched City pick off Rodgers' team, first with Stevan Jovetic's brilliantly opportunistic first-half goal and then with another beautifully worked after half-time before Agüero added the third. The City fans knew it too, singing Suarez's name as their team went three goals ahead as a reminder that these are the sort of players who arrive once in a generation and, once gone, are almost impossible to replace. That is not to say that the Liverpool team Suarez has left behind is a lost cause. They still look good for the top four. At times Rodgers' side were excellent; they had the best of the first half and Rickie Lambert, as a substitute, led an admirable late surge that led to their goal. Yet to beat City these days, it has to be close to perfect. They are a squad of daunting depth, with a work ethic that allows them to break down teams over time. Jovetic, with another two goals, is emerging as a fine Premier League-ready player. Having been on the back foot for much of the first half, they gradually shut down the biggest threats that Liverpool posed them, through Daniel Sturridge and Raheem Sterling, and went about the business of winning the game. It takes just a moment at this level for a mistake to be made, an advantage to be gained and a goal to be scored. So it was four minutes before half-time when Alberto Moreno's pink boot failed to connect with the loose ball in his own box and a minor catastrophe unfolded before him. A heartbeat earlier, Jovetic had steered it away and then, with his next touch, hit a shot so hard it went through Simon Mignolet's legs before he could snap them shut. For Moreno, it was an introduction to life at the top of the Premier League where, for defenders in particular, reputations are made and lost in moments like that. This had been a first half between two beautifully balanced teams with no margin for error at either end, as the man from Seville discovered to his cost. Until then Liverpool had the best of it, closing City down relentlessly in midfield. Coutinho wriggled clear of Yaya Touré on 29 minutes and the big City midfielder earned himself a booking as he reached down to try to drag the Brazilian back into his range of influence. Sturridge's turn and shot in the City area four minutes later was the best individual moment for his side.

On that occasion Vincent Kompany flung his arms wide to indicate he was beaten and would not be doing anything daft to try to reel Sturridge in. It was that kind of penalty box sharpness that England lacked so badly in Brazil this summer at the end of a long, tiring season. But Sturridge hit his shot straight at Joe Hart and City got away with it. If there was a regret for Rodgers in his team's attacking play it was that Sterling, one of five Englishmen in the starting XI for Liverpool, did not find himself on the ball enough. His staggering pace threatened to expose Pablo Zabaleta on one occasion, but City managed to prevent the winger from isolating their defenders more often than not. As ever, Liverpool are not wedded to the slow build-up and will look to Steven Gerrard for the quick ball over the top. But City are a resolute bunch and it was Samir Nasri's excellent chip into David Silva from the right that began the sequence that led to the goal. Dejan Lovren's clearing header did not do the complete job, Moreno failed to react quickly enough and Jovetic did the rest. There was a marvellous burst from Sterling past Fernando early in the second half which drew a foul from the Brazilian but Liverpool could not find the equaliser and on 55 minutes Jovetic pounced again. This time it was a flick from Silva's ball into the path of Samir Nasri on the right who crossed to the back of the box where Jovetic's run took him into the right position to stroke the ball in with his left foot. Agüero came on for the injured Dzeko on 68 minutes and a moment later angled his run across Dejan Lovren, beat the defender for sheer pace and tucked the ball past Mignolet.

That was the game, although there was time for Lambert to force a goal for Liverpool when he met Sturridge's outside-of-the-foot cross at the back post. Hart did well to save but could do nothing to keep out the rebound off Zabaleta. This season there will be few who get as close to City as Liverpool managed, but

that will be scant consolation when they remember that victory in April and the reality of life post-Suarez.

### MATCH IN NUMBERS

8 Liverpool lost away in the league for the first time in eight months

23 Seconds Sergio Agüero was on the pitch before scoring City's third last night  
4 Jovetic goals in two games v Liverpool (also scored twice for Fiorentina)



### Sergio Agüero seals win for ruthless champions

Two down, 36 to go. Ruthless, relentless, and still with far more to come.

Manuel Pellegrini is not a man for premature gestures or statements of triumph, his messages delivered in more subtle tones.

He leaves the grander actions to his players, Stevan Jovetic continuing his pre-season response to the challenge laid down, Sergio Agüero making an instant impact off the bench.

But as City laid out a marker of their title intentions, only Pablo Zabaleta's late own goal denying them top-spot, this was a signal meant for Chelsea, in particular, to observe and consider.

Liverpool, exposed down their left far too easily, will know that Mario Balotelli's arrival will not be a panacea, even if it will alter the dynamics of a side that exited the Etihad with regrets, but no reason for complaints.

Last Christmas, in the corresponding game, City got away with it, big-time, the contentious calls going their way, Liverpool leaving with a sense of grievance that cost Brendan Rodgers £8,000 for questioning referee Lee Mason.

That was certainly not the case last night. Not at all. No arguments. No doubts.

Yes, for 40-odd minutes, City were second-best to a Liverpool side which was bright and inventive in possession, Raheem Sterling threatening to make the night all about him.

Yet once Jovetic took brutal advantage of Alberto Moreno's moment of hesitation, walking through the pitiful attempt at a clearance to lash past Simon Mignolet, City went through the gears.

All of them? No. There was no need to hit overdrive.

But the manner in which City began to find each other, create openings, expose the frailties of Liverpool's left side, was a further sign that Pellegrini's men will not make the mistake of resting on their laurels that proved so costly for Roberto Mancini after his team captured the crown.

This City side does appear strengthened by the summer activities, not weakened. Fernando represents an even more physical counterweight to Yaya Toure than Fernandinho, there is still Eliaquim Mangala to come.

And with Jovetic playing like a man determined to prove he has a proper role to play after spending most of last term as a passenger on the title train, Agüero still feeling his way back to full-bore, options out wide, this was an ominous warning for the rest.

City had initially struggled to impress, Sterling causing them problems, Daniel Sturridge finding the space to shoot at Joe Hart, who was not always entirely convincing as the ball was whipped in.

Yet with Vincent Kompany totally committed, City kept themselves on terms and waited, like a cobra, for the opportunity to come their way.

It did, three minutes before the break.

Moreno, on his debut after that £12million move from Sevilla, had impressed motoring down the left flank.

But defenders first and foremost, have to defend and Moreno was horribly, painfully and fatally deficient when Dejan Lovren's weak header came his way. As Moreno dawdled, Jovetic, escaping Steven Gerrard, woke up, seizing on the instant of weakness, crashing home.

It was only the £22million striker's fourth Premier League goal, celebrated with genuine delight but when he added another soon after the interval the Etihad was even happier.

This was a quality goal, too, Edin Dzeko's flick sending Samir Nasri through Moreno's channel, the pull-back falling onto Jovetic's left foot, with the Montenegrin forcing home first-time.

Rodgers, with Balotelli watching from on high, reacted by sending on Lazar Markovic but when Kompany foiled Sturridge, City steeled themselves anew.

Enter, as against Newcastle, Agüero. Still recovering, not fully-fit. But deadly, as demonstrated within 23 seconds of his arrival.

Credit should go, too, to fellow substitute Jesus Navas, taking Moreno out of the game with a ball from wide which saw Agüero slip in behind Lovren to beat Mignolet with elegant ease.

Game over and, had it stayed at three, top spot on alphabetical order, a scenario spoiled when Hart pushed Rickie Lambert's point-blank header against Zabaleta's knee and back over his own line.

The only sour note. Big questions for Liverpool, who lost Glen Johnson and had Moreno, Markovic and Martin Skrtel all limping at the end. City, already, look a class act.

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When Brendan Rodgers warned Manchester City they could expect more of the same from Liverpool this season this wasn't what he had in mind.

The defensive frailties which ultimately cost the Reds the Premier League crown last term once again proved their undoing on a chastening night at the Etihad Stadium. Their proud unbeaten away league record stretching back to last December bit the dust as Manuel Pellegrini's side won with plenty to spare.

This was a mile away from the statement of intent the Liverpool boss had targeted just hours after the club had confirmed the acquisition of Mario Balotelli.

The £16million Italian striker watched on from the directors' box as his former employers gave his new team-mates the runaround. The travelling Kop left Balotelli in no doubt about their excitement at his arrival with a rapturous reception. But in truth they had precious little else to cheer about. For most of the first half Liverpool were the better side but created little and were then ruthlessly punished for careless lapses in concentration. Stevan Jovetic struck either side of half-time and substitute Sergio Agüero piled on the misery prior to Pablo Zabaleta's late own goal. Rodgers was left counting the cost in more ways than one. With all three subs used, the Reds finished the game with 10 men after Glen Johnson pulled up clutching his hamstring, while Martin Skrtel and Alberto Moreno were both limping come the end. Asked what Balotelli will bring to his squad before kick-off, Rodgers joked "trouble" before admitting this is likely to be the controversial frontman's last chance to deliver at a top club.

The manager knows he will have his work cut out trying to keep Balotelli on the straight and narrow but his priority prior to Sunday's trip to Spurs will be sorting out his porous backline. After a summer of change at Anfield, which has been nine players signed at a combined cost of £116million and Luis Suarez's exit, a period of transition is to be expected. But Rodgers needs them to learn fast in such an unforgiving environment if the Reds are serious about building on the immense progress which has been made over the past 18 months.

Rodgers made two changes following the opening weekend win over Southampton with new £12million left-back Moreno handed his debut. Johnson switched to the other flank with young Spaniard Javier Manquillo dropping to the bench. Lucas Leiva had been a surprise selection against Saints but having failed to grasp his chance he was predictably axed. The fact that the Brazilian midfielder didn't even make the bench will intensify speculation that his seven-year Anfield career is drawing to a close. Napoli want him on loan but Liverpool are adamant he will only leave if they get a suitable permanent cash offer.

Joe Allen, whose introduction against Southampton helped turn the game the Reds' way, replaced Lucas as Rodgers went with a 4-1-4-1 formation with Steven Gerrard the only holding midfielder. The home supporters repeatedly reminded Liverpool about the prize which had slipped from their grasp last term. A giant banner proclaimed 'we are the champions', while most of the songs were at the Reds' expense. Yet the atmosphere appeared to energise Rodgers' side early on and they outplayed City for most of the opening 45 minutes.

Allen carried on where he had left off as the Welshman worked tirelessly alongside Jordan Henderson to win back possession and used the ball wisely. Raheem Sterling was a menace down the right flank, while the mocking chants from the stands only served to strengthen Gerrard's resolve.

The skipper threatened to silence them with a pin-point searching long pass towards Sterling early on. The teenager's pace took him clear and his control was impressive but he scuffed his volley wide. Liverpool restricted City to few clear cut chances with Edin Dzeko well shackled by Martin Skrtel and Dejan Lovren.

When Dzeko did find space on the edge of the box he failed to hit the target and then Zabaleta blazed over from Gael Clichy's cross. Yaya Toure's curler forced Simon Mignolet into action but Liverpool were never under the cosh.

The frustration for Rodgers was that they didn't make the most of their possession as attacks kept on floundering in the final third. Philippe Coutinho lit up the Reds' pre-season matches but he hasn't been able to transfer it into competitive action so far. The little Brazilian was infuriatingly wasteful as passes went astray and he regularly picked the wrong option. Liverpool did unlock the City rearguard courtesy of Sterling spotting Henderson's clever run, but rather than hit it first time the England midfielder opted to take a touch and the opening disappeared. Twelve minutes before the break Sturridge, who had been short of support, belatedly came to life. His quick feet left Vincent Kompany trailing inside the penalty box but the angle was tight and Joe Hart kept it out at his near post. Having produced such a disciplined performance, all the Reds' hard work was undone by a defensive lapse in the 41st minute.

Lovren's nodded the ball away from David Silva but Moreno hesitated and the new boy was punished. Jovetic nipped in ahead of him and gave Mignolet no chance. It was a harsh lesson for Moreno in the pace of the English game. The Spain international did save the Reds' blushes early in the second half as he raced across to deny Dzeko before he could pull the trigger.

But in truth the damage was already done. After breaking the deadlock, City grew in confidence and doubled their tally in the 55th minute.

Once again Liverpool were undone far too easily. Jovetic's flick released Samir Nasri down the right and the Montenegrin raced untracked towards the back post and he tucked away the resulting cross.

Rodgers responded by handing a debut to Lazar Markovic, who replaced the ineffective Coutinho. Briefly, there was a flicker of hope as the £20million Serbian winger improved the Reds. Kompany's last-ditch tackle thwarted Sturridge before he could pull the trigger and then the striker's fierce strike was tipped away by Hart. The revival was stopped in its tracks as City made it 3-0 in the 69th minute. Just seconds after replacing Dzeko, Agüero burst away from Lovren to gather Jesus Navas' incisive pass and coolly slotted past Mignolet.

Emre Can came on for Allen and Lambert swiftly followed for Sterling.

With seven minutes to go the deficit was reduced. Lambert's header from Sturridge's centre was parried by Hart but it struck Zabaleta and rolled over the line. It was scant consolation on a night to forget.

## MANCHESTER EVENING NEWS

Stevan Jovetic finally exploded onto the Premier League scene just over a year after his move to City. The Montenegrin striker scored twice to put title rivals Liverpool to the sword, with Sergio Agüero scoring another, with his first touch as substitute after just 23 seconds on the pitch.

The only pity is that persistent injury problems have robbed us of seeing "JoJo" in action for so long. He first made English clubs sit up and take notice in 2009, when his two goals for Fiorentina sank Liverpool in the Champions League.

Five years on, and he was Scouse-busting again, snapping up an opportunist first goal and then brilliantly creating and finishing a second goal.

Everyone knew he was an exciting talent, but now, with a full pre-season under his belt, we are seeing the extent of his ability. But this win was about more than just Jovetic – it was about underlining City's credentials as champions, and setting down an early marker for this season. There is a general feeling around City that the club did not get the credit they deserved last season, despite the fact they were clearly the best team in the country. Early in the season the talk was about whether Arsenal could sustain their powerful start, then it was about Jose Mourinho trying to mind-game his way to the top, and finally the romance of Liverpool winning it again, 25 years on from Hillsborough. Then, of course, there was the troubles at United to chew over. Amidst all that, the Blues simply got on with winning games and scoring goals, remarkably under the radar for a team of such class and excitement. Even when they times their run to the top perfectly, some focussed on Liverpool "blowing it" rather than the Blues winning it.

City wanted a commanding performance to underline their true worth as champions, especially with the team that ran them the closest being the visitors to the Etihad Stadium. It was like old times for the City fans in the corner of the South Stand, which has lost part of its roof to the ground expansion – they defied the rain in their ponchos, a reprise of the old Gene Kelly Stand at Maine Road.

Manager Manuel Pellegrini has clearly got one eye on playing a five-man midfield in some big games this season, but in the season's first home game, he decided to be more adventurous. He played both Jovetic and Edin Dzeko, and that meant Liverpool's five-man midfield had a numerical advantage which they exploited to good effect in the first half. And with Raheem Sterling's pace again unnerving the Blues' back line, the Scousers could count themselves unfortunate to go in behind at the break. When ex-Blue Daniel Sturridge tricked his way past Vincent Kompany to fashion a shooting chance, he was unlucky to blast his shot straight at the broad chest of his old teammate Joe Hart.

Pellegrini must have been pondering a change, but City finally found their feet in the Liverpool penalty area four minutes before half time.

Silva struggled to control a high ball and Liverpool debut boy Alberto Moreno stepped in to take it. But the left back hesitated for a second, and Jovetic was in. He darted goalwards and thrashed his shot low and hard under Simon Mignolet's sprawling attempt to save. In a game of this closeness, there was always a chance that a defensive error could make all the difference, and Jovetic's strike changed the complexion of the game. The goal was a game-changer. Now it was Liverpool's turn to try to force the pace, while City could sit and pick them off.

That made space for Dzeko and Jovetic and their supporting cast, and they took full advantage. Now the Blues looked threatening with every counter, and on 55 minutes they grabbed the second.

Silva was the architect, but it was Jovetic who took centre stage. The Spaniard played the ball into him on the edge of the box, and his clever backheel flick found Samir Nasri in space on the right.

Jovetic span and continued his run to the far post, and the French midfielder picked him out with a perfect ball that begged to be finished.

Pellegrini then made two changes, with Jesus Navas coming on as a counter-attacking midfielder, and Agüero replacing the injured Dzeko.

It was a devastating switch. Within 23 seconds of coming on, Agüero darted on to a Navas pass down the right channel, and flashed his shot past Mignolet to make it 3-0.

Just when City looked to be cruising to a comfortable win and top spot, albeit on alphabetical order, they relaxed and gave Liverpool a sniff.

Sturridge robbed Martin Demichelis in the corner and crossed for sub Rickie Lambert. His header was brilliantly saved by Hart at point-blank range by the ball bounced off Pablo Zabaleta and over the line.

Liverpool sensed an opportunity and drove forward. Kompany forced into more desperate defending – but the Blues closed it out well.

Date: 25 August 2014  
 Opposition: Manchester City  
 Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	MEN
Guardian	Mirror	Echo
Independent	Mail	BBC

25 August 2014



Manchester City delivered an early statement of intent as the Premier League champions comfortably overcame last season's runners-up Liverpool at Etihad Stadium.

Stevan Jovetic scored either side of half-time to punish Liverpool, who dominated much of the first half without creating the opportunities to go with their excellent work-rate and approach work.

And as Liverpool's new £16m signing Mario Balotelli watched from the directors' box against his former club, any hopes of a comeback were snuffed out when Sergio Aguero slid home the third 23 seconds after coming on as substitute for the injured Edin Dzeko.

Pablo Zabaleta's own goal at least got Liverpool on the scoresheet but the last 20 minutes were played out as a formality, such was City's control.

Jovetic's first season at City was hampered by injuries but he has form for tormenting Liverpool after scoring twice against them in Fiorentina's Champions League win in 2009 and he showed his quality again here.

Liverpool are in a period of transition with nine new signings this summer following the departure of Luis Suarez to Barcelona.

And, while they were the better side for the first 40 minutes, they never recovered from an error by debutant Alberto Moreno that allowed City to take the lead just before half-time.

The pleasure for Manchester City manager Manuel Pellegrini will not just come from the victory, but also from the fact that it was achieved without ever truly hitting the heights against the team who pushed them to the final day of last season's title race.

For City, without needing to be at their best, this was very much business as usual for the reigning champions.

Liverpool will obviously miss a player of Suarez's world-class calibre but Rodgers must also be given time to bed in his reshaped squad, and these early days of the season will represent a work in progress.

Rodgers will also be hoping the maverick Balotelli will provide the sort of X-factor Suarez provided without the accompanying unsavoury headlines once he gets down to business after completing his move from AC Milan.

Liverpool's greater strength in midfield numbers and intense pressing posed problems for City until the deadlock was broken after 41 minutes in a manner the visitors' manager would have found hugely unsatisfactory.

Dejan Lovren attempted to find Moreno with a header in the area but the £12m signing from Sevilla hesitated, allowing Jovetic to pounce and beat Simon Mignolet.

If Jovetic's first goal owed something to a Liverpool lapse, his second, 10 minutes after the restart, was a superb team goal started and finished by the talented Montenegrin.

Jovetic's brilliant flick set Samir Nasri free and he continued his run into the area to end a prolonged period of City passing with another emphatic finish.

City wrapped things up in remarkable fashion with 21 minutes left. Aguero made his entrance to replace Dzeko and, within seconds, he was running on to Jesus Navas's perfect pass to beat Mignolet from a tight angle.

Liverpool pulled a goal back when Zabaleta turned into his own net after a far-post scramble with Rickie Lambert, but there was no consolation on offer here, only the concern of defender Glen Johnson limping off with what looked like a groin injury.

Rodgers will hope Balotelli can help bridge the gap between the sides over the course of a season but this was an impressively understated win from City.

Manchester City manager Manuel Pellegrini: "We worked the whole game and played a very good team. We worked without the ball for 95 minutes and with the ball we made enough danger to score three goals.

"When you play against a strong team you have to concentrate and our concentration and intensity was good. Liverpool are an important team and one that will be fighting for the title. It's so important to get six points from our first two games as it was a very difficult start for us.

"Stevan Jovetic was very unlucky last season and he had so many injuries. He has been patient and worked very hard to come again. We bought him because he is a very good player, he had a good pre-season and I'm very happy for him - he deserves it.

"We need four strikers. At this moment Stevan is doing very well but you cannot forget Alvaro Negredo is injured. Edin Dzeko and Jovetic and Aguero are working well. It is important that they continue playing the way they did."

Date: 25 August 2014

Opposition: Manchester City

Competition: League

Times	Telegraph	MEN
Guardian	Mirror	Echo
Independent	Mail	BBC

25 August 2014



Full time Match ends, Manchester City 3, Liverpool 1.

90:00+5:21 Full time Second Half ends, Manchester City 3, Liverpool 1.

90:00+4:47 Corner, Manchester City. Conceded by Alberto Moreno.

90:00+4:06 Attempt missed. Sergio Agüero (Manchester City right footed shot from a difficult angle on the right is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Fernandinho.

90:00+3:52 Attempt blocked. Yaya Touré (Manchester City right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Samir Nasri.

90:00+0:22 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

89:47 Delay in match Alberto Moreno (Liverpool because of an injury.

88:17 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

86:57 Delay in match Martin Skrtel (Liverpool because of an injury.

86:26 Foul by Yaya Touré (Manchester City.

86:26 Martin Skrtel (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

85:32 Glen Johnson went off injured after Liverpool had used all subs.

85:24 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

84:41 Delay in match Glen Johnson (Liverpool because of an injury.

82:18 Goal scored Goal! Own Goal by Pablo Zabaleta, Manchester City. Manchester City 3, Liverpool 1.

82:17 Attempt saved. Rickie Lambert (Liverpool header from the centre of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Daniel Sturridge with a cross.

80:56 Corner, Manchester City. Conceded by Martin Skrtel.

79:23 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Manchester City. Fernandinho replaces Stevan Jovetic.

78:52 Attempt missed. Emre Can (Liverpool header from the centre of the box is too high. Assisted by Jordan Henderson with a cross following a corner.

78:35 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Rickie Lambert replaces Raheem Sterling.

77:54 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Gaël Clichy.

75:38 Booking Emre Can (Liverpool is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

75:34 Stevan Jovetic (Manchester City wins a free kick in the attacking half.

75:34 Foul by Emre Can (Liverpool.

74:06 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Emre Can replaces Joe Allen.

71:12 Foul by Fernando (Manchester City.

71:12 Joe Allen (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

68:23 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Manchester City 3, Liverpool 0. Sergio Agüero (Manchester City right footed shot from the right side of the box to the bottom right corner. Assisted by Jesús Navas with a through ball.

68:00 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Manchester City. Sergio Agüero replaces Edin Dzeko because of an injury.

67:51 Delay over. They are ready to continue.

66:27 Delay in match Edin Dzeko (Manchester City because of an injury.

65:24 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool header from the centre of the box misses to the left. Assisted by Alberto Moreno with a cross.

64:55 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Manchester City. Jesús Navas replaces David Silva.

64:06 Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool right footed shot from a difficult angle on the right is saved in the bottom right corner. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.

62:54 Offside, Manchester City. Vincent Kompany tries a through ball, but Edin Dzeko is caught offside.

61:25 Samir Nasri (Manchester City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

61:25 Foul by Dejan Lovren (Liverpool.

61:01 Attempt blocked. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the centre of the box is blocked. Assisted by Lazar Markovic.

60:08 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Fernando.

59:16 Substitution Substitution Substitution, Liverpool. Lazar Markovic replaces Philippe Coutinho.

58:46 Attempt missed. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from outside the box misses to the left. Assisted by Steven Gerrard.

58:01 Foul by Edin Dzeko (Manchester City.

58:01 Martin Skrtel (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

54:21 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Manchester City 2, Liverpool 0. Stevan Jovetic (Manchester City left footed shot from the centre of the box to the bottom left corner. Assisted by Samir Nasri.

52:37 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Pablo Zabaleta.

51:34 Foul by Fernando (Manchester City.

51:34 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

49:57 Attempt missed. Stevan Jovetic (Manchester City header from the centre of the box is close, but misses the top right corner. Assisted by Samir Nasri with a cross following a corner.

49:38 Corner, Manchester City. Conceded by Dejan Lovren.

48:45 Corner, Manchester City. Conceded by Alberto Moreno.

48:09 Offside, Liverpool. Glen Johnson tries a through ball, but Daniel Sturridge is caught offside.

45:00 Second Half begins Manchester City 1, Liverpool 0.

45:00+1:14 Half time First Half ends, Manchester City 1, Liverpool 0.

45:00+0:20 Foul by Samir Nasri (Manchester City.

45:00+0:20 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

44:44 Edin Dzeko (Manchester City wins a free kick on the left wing.

44:44 Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.

43:19 David Silva (Manchester City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

43:19 Foul by Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool.

40:19 Goal scored Goal! Goal! Manchester City 1, Liverpool 0. Stevan Jovetic (Manchester City right footed shot from the right side of the box to the top right corner.

39:10 Corner, Manchester City. Conceded by Steven Gerrard.

36:15 Yaya Touré (Manchester City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

36:15 Foul by Raheem Sterling (Liverpool.

32:16 Attempt saved. Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool left footed shot from the left side of the box is saved in the bottom left corner. Assisted by Raheem Sterling.

30:47 Foul by Edin Dzeko (Manchester City.

30:47 Dejan Lovren (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

29:24 Foul by Gaël Clichy (Manchester City.

29:24 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

28:25 Booking Yaya Touré (Manchester City is shown the yellow card for a bad foul.

28:08 Foul by Yaya Touré (Manchester City.

28:08 Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool wins a free kick in the attacking half.

24:22 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Martín Demichelis.

23:13 Foul by Fernando (Manchester City.

23:13 Simon Mignolet (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

22:49 Corner, Manchester City. Conceded by Philippe Coutinho.

20:45 Foul by Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City.

20:45 Alberto Moreno (Liverpool wins a free kick on the left wing.

16:48 Attempt blocked. Joe Allen (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

15:52 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Joe Hart.

15:26 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Fernando.

15:22 Attempt blocked. Steven Gerrard (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked.

14:47 Attempt saved. Yaya Touré (Manchester City right footed shot from outside the box is saved in the bottom right corner.

14:05 Vincent Kompany (Manchester City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

14:05 Foul by Martin Skrtel (Liverpool.

13:39 Corner, Liverpool. Conceded by Vincent Kompany.

12:23 Attempt missed. Pablo Zabaleta (Manchester City right footed shot from a difficult angle on the right is too high. Assisted by Gaël Clichy with a cross.

11:07 Foul by Samir Nasri (Manchester City.

11:07 Dejan Lovren (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

9:49 Foul by Martín Demichelis (Manchester City.

9:49 Raheem Sterling (Liverpool wins a free kick on the right wing.

8:50 Attempt missed. Raheem Sterling (Liverpool right footed shot from the centre of the box is close, but misses to the right. Assisted by Steven Gerrard.

7:01 Attempt missed. Edin Dzeko (Manchester City left footed shot from outside the box misses to the right. Assisted by Stevan Jovetic.

5:33 Attempt blocked. Philippe Coutinho (Liverpool right footed shot from outside the box is blocked. Assisted by Daniel Sturridge.

4:54 Stevan Jovetic (Manchester City wins a free kick in the defensive half.

4:54 Foul by Alberto Moreno (Liverpool.

0:57 Foul by Vincent Kompany (Manchester City.

0:57 Daniel Sturridge (Liverpool wins a free kick in the defensive half.

0:00 First Half begins.

0:00 Lineups are announced and players are warming up.